

## Risk of injury . . .

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Schindler said new rules can improve safety, but rules will not make problems disappear.

"If somebody broke his neck because he put his head in wrong, the penalty flag doesn't mean much."

On Nov. 23, five days after the accident, Jerry was moved to a hospital in Denver to begin rehabilitation. His days followed a schedule of therapy and hard work — breakfast at eight; at nine, a class to stretch his muscles and prepare them for the day's activities; school at 10 and lunch at noon. In the afternoon, he learned how to use and care for a wheelchair; he exercised to strengthen his upper arm muscles where he had movement; he relearned how to do things like brush his teeth. After supper, he watched television or talked on the phone with family or friends.

What goes through a person's mind when he's away from home trying to learn simple tasks all over again? Hope? Doubt? Fear? Anger? Does there come a time when the person accepts his paralysis or does the hope continue?

Jerry worked hard to get better.

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The new rules have triggered positive changes in coaching. Before 1976, coaches often taught players to drive the helmet into an opponent when tackling, blocking or running the ball. Since the spearing rule change, most coaches have abandoned the technique.

"I'm not aware of any coaches in the state who teach spearing or unsafe techniques," said Skip Morris, executive director of the Nebraska Coaches Association.

Morris said coaches have been made more aware of the injury situation through coaching clinics and published studies and articles. He said "the Vince Lombardi style" of coaching, where a win-at-all-costs attitude was taught to players, has given way to more healthy methods.

Jerry's parents, John and Joanne, visited him every weekend. During Christmas vacation, several Henderson teachers and students traveled to Denver for holiday visits. A Lincoln television station broadcast two programs about his accident and his rehabilitation, informing the state of his progress.

Jerry's hometown and school have pulled together to support him. Henderson principal Jim Peters said any word of Jerry's progress passes among the students quickly and after-school prayer meetings have been well attended.

Peters said there have always been injuries in Henderson athletics and that they are accepted as part of the game. He said Henderson had never had a serious injury until November. That injury was different.

New rules, better coaching, modern equipment and experience have helped make the game of football safer. The risk of injury and death has been reduced, but it cannot be totally eliminated from a sport like football.

"As much as we do, there will always be a scattering of fatalities," said Dr. Michael Walsh, director of sports medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

He said there has been more interest in football injuries in recent years. Clinics to inform coaches about injury prevention and care run throughout the state and more coaches take cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid classes. Sports medicine has become more important in athletic conditioning and universities are producing more certified athletic trainers to prevent and care for injuries. Statistics show that indirect deaths, especially heat-related deaths, continue to be rare. In 1983, no such deaths were reported in high school football.

But progress has been slow on the medical front. (See related story, page 11). Only a few schools have full-time trainers or doctors. Many small towns, miles from a doctor or a hospital, still need trained people to attend games and handle emergency situations. And even the best prevention and care cannot reduce the hard-hitting that sets football apart from other sports.

In March, Jerry went home for a weekend. The Henderson boys' and girls' basketball teams were playing in the state tournament.

Jerry was a reserve on the team last year. This year, he sat in a wheelchair near his team's bench.

Football's shortcomings are magnified every time a player is paralyzed or killed. Because these incidents don't happen as often as other accidents, such as traffic mishaps, they are highly publicized. The

**American  
Red Cross**

public's perspective of the game might be distorted and the relative safety of the game might be forgotten.

"It is the most negative thing that can happen in high school athletics," Schindler said.

Schindler said that when the risks in football are compared to other activities, such as driving a car, football is much safer. He said a game like football cannot be made risk-free if the game is to continue as a contact sport.

"We have to be realistic and practical," he said. "There is no way to play the game if you try to protect everyone so they don't get hurt."

Jones said parents who worry about their sons playing football must ask themselves if they would be safer participating in an unsupervised activity.

"There's a certain risk in everything we do. More parents would rather have their sons and daughters participating in organized activities."

Major rule changes implemented by the National Federation of State High School Associations in high school football since 1972:

- 1972 — Blocking below the waist restricted to the free blocking zone — an area three yards on either side of the line of scrimmage.
- 1973 — A chin strap included as a required part of the helmet.
- 1974 — Blocking below the waist prohibited on kicks.
- 1975 — Spearing made illegal and defined as a disqualifying foul.
- 1976 — Head-but blocking and face tackling made personal fouls. Hip and shoulder pads became required equipment.
- 1977 — Thigh guards became required equipment.
- 1978 — The penalty for roughing the kicker or placekick holder becomes an automatic first down and a 15-yard penalty.
- 1980 — All helmets required to have National Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment certification. Grasping the helmet opening becomes a foul.
- 1981 — Any blocking below the waist outside the free blocking zone prohibited. Chop blocks made illegal.

A cool, damp November night. A great night for football.

The coaches had coached their players well. The rules were in force. An ambulance was at the game and a hospital was nearby.

And Jerry Ediger is a quadriplegic. He was the statistic — the 0.71 seriously injured of 100,000 young men who step onto a football field each season and walk off at season's end with nothing more than a few bruises and memories of hard-fought wins and disappointing losses.

Jerry Ediger will graduate in May. He will have some of the same memories as his teammates and other fellow students.

But he will face a different future than the others. His plans and goals may remain the same, but his injury has changed the way he will pursue them. And though he will go on and deal with the obstacles posed by his tragic injury, things will never be the same.

With all the rules and equipment and precautions and progress, the risk that it might happen was always there.

## Huskers not shaking in fear of playing improved Bluejays

By Bob Asmussen

Just because the Creighton basketball team has played well in their last seven games does not mean Nebraska fears its first-round opponent in the National Invitation Tournament Thursday night, Nebraska Coach Moe Iba said Tuesday.

"I think our kids think they'll play well," Iba said. "I don't think they're sitting in their rooms shaking 'cause they have to play Creighton."

The Bluejays played probably their best basketball of the season during the Missouri Valley Conference post-season tournament. Creighton defeated Bradley at home and Illinois State on the road before losing to Tulsa in the tournament final at Tulsa.

"The win that opened my eyes to how improved they are is the 10-point win at Illinois State," Iba said.

Despite the frustration of losing to Kansas State in the opening round of the Big Eight tournament, the Cornhuskers are ready to continue there season, Iba said.

"We're very happy that we got an invitation to the NIT," Iba said.

Nebraska's earlier 65-58 victory against Creighton should be an ad-

vantage for the Bluejays, Iba said.

"The thing we have to do is convince our team that Creighton is a much better team than they were in December," Iba said. "I can think of a whole lot of places I'd rather play than in Omaha against Creighton."

In Nebraska's earlier win against Creighton, Bluejay center Benoit Benjamin got into early foul trouble and scored only 10 points. Iba said Benjamin has played better because the whole Creighton team has played better.

"They do an excellent job on the offensive boards with Brandon and Benjamin," Iba said. "In the Illinois State game, Brandon had 17 rebounds — nine offensive and eight defensive."

To defeat Creighton on their home court, Iba said he thinks Nebraska will have to play as well as it did in the first game with the Bluejays.

"We've got to go out and get after Creighton early in the ball game," Iba said.

Unlike last season, the NIT will not be using a 30-second shot clock. In its place, the NIT will use a 45-second clock that will be turned off for the last four minutes of the game.

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